

CAGE
E453
W45
1872

UNIVERSITY

THE HISTORY OF EMANCIPATION.

THE treatment and disposition of slaves who were captured, or who came within the lines of the Union armies, were in the early days of the war perplexing questions, and contributed to embarrass the Government and confuse individuals. By the Constitution, from which the Administration derived its authority, the institution of slavery was recognized, and the right of property in slaves, secured by the local law, was protected. Neither the President nor any member of the Cabinet was disposed to interfere with the institution of slavery, or believed the Government could legally interfere. Mr. Lincoln had declared previous to his election, and reiterated at his inauguration—"I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so." Notwithstanding all this, he was denounced as an abolitionist, and it was persistently maintained that it was his purpose and the purpose of his Administration to set free the slaves. The members of the Administration, though selected from the old opposing traditional parties, were, like the President, for preserving inviolable the constitutional compact in regard to slavery. In the controversy which followed the acquisition of territory from Mexico and the settlement and organization of Kansas, they had been united in affirming the nationality of freedom and opposing the extension of slavery into the territories. Slavery being the creature of local, not of national law, the President and the members of the Cabinet, though of different party antecedents, had each, in the Presidential elections of 1856 and 1860, advocated the policy of strict construction and of limiting human servitude to the States which authorized its existence. They denied that the Federal Government was empowered to transplant or establish slavery in the territories where it had no existence, but insisted that it was, and must remain, the creature of local municipal laws. This policy of non-action—refusal to assume ungranted power, or to exercise

jurisdiction in behalf of slavery beyond the boundaries of the States, except that of returning slaves to their owners under the constitutional provision—was the extent of the abolitionism of the President and Cabinet; yet this policy of non-action and of strict construction was made the basis of disaffection and civil war. Soon after hostilities commenced fugitives from servitude began to come to Washington, and appeared on the decks of our vessels and within the lines of the Union armies. For a time the owners—secessionists as well as Union men—reclaimed their slaves under the laws and Constitution; and in many instances the fugitives were surrendered by the military commanders to their rebel masters, who invoked for this species of property the assistance and protection of the laws and the very government which they and their associates repudiated and defied. What, it began to be asked, is the status—what are the rights of these men who spurn the Constitution and are making war upon the Government? If they have thrown off their allegiance and refuse to acknowledge any obligation to the Government—if they are not citizens of the United States, as they affirm they are not, but are alien enemies—what right have they to appeal to the laws of the United States, and demand that the bondsmen who have left them and sought freedom under the flag shall be returned to their rebel masters and the rebel governments and to bondage? Could the Administration allow itself to consider and treat these slave-owners as alien enemies? Could the Government admit that secession was so far an accomplished fact as to place those who resided within the limits of a rebel State beyond the pale of the laws which ordered slaves to be restored to their owners? If they owed allegiance to the Government, as they undoubtedly did, was it not the duty of the Government to protect them in person and property?

Application from commanders on duty soon began to reach the War and Navy Departments, asking for instructions how to proceed, and what to do with the fugitive slaves who fled to us and asked protec-

CAGE
E453
•W45
1872

tion. This, in the early days of the insurrection, was a difficult problem, and in the new and singular state of affairs, for which no legal provision had been made, did not receive final formal decision from the Government. The Secretaries of War and the Navy, in the absence of distinct action by the Administration, were compelled to take the responsibility of giving such instructions to the officers as in their judgment was best for the public welfare. Every movement of the Executive was watched and scanned by opposing factions in the free States as earnestly as in the slave States. One party insisted that the President was tender toward the slave-owners; the other declared it to be his purpose to oppress and rob them; while his wish and intention were to obey the laws, administer them justly, protect individuals, observe State and federal as well as personal rights, and maintain the Union at all hazards and at any sacrifice. Neither the Secretary of War nor the Secretary of the Navy shrank from the responsibility of meeting and disposing of this difficult subject, so far as it devolved on them. In the conflict of authorities between the States and the General Government, the consequent quasi suspension of the laws, and the unsettled condition of affairs, no more was put upon paper than was necessary. Verbal instructions were given to the commanders not to entice slaves to come to them, but to receive, feed, and employ such as fled from any States which had passed a secession ordinance and was by force resisting the Government. Slaves from the non-seceding slave States who came to our vessels or navy-yards were restored to the owners who reclaimed them pursuant to law. In some instances, where fugitives had deserted loyal owners in Virginia and were retained by us, and in others where they had fled from violent and outspoken rebels in Maryland, but were surrendered, this rule operated harshly. There seemed, however, for the time, no alternative. The action of the States respectively controlled the action of the departments in these cases. Those States which, by their legislatures and conventions, had assumed the right and undertaken to dissolve their connection with the Government, to secede from the Union, and were resisting by armed force the national authority, were not entitled, while in arms against the Government, to

claim its assistance to subjugate and deprive persons, black or white, of their freedom. But slaveholders residing in non-seceding States, although themselves in sympathy and opinion with the secessionists, yet had committed no overt act, were under the ægis of the Federal Constitution, protected by the laws, and secure in their rights. There were some hard and afflictive cases under this ruling, when slaves were sent back to servitude under cruel and really disloyal masters on one side of the Potomac in Maryland, while the owners on the opposite side of the river in Virginia, though loyal to the Union, lost their slave property. There was sympathy for the sufferers in each case, and anathemas and wrathful indignation against the Government in both for its alleged severity, inhumanity, and injustice. Not only the opponents of the Administration, but many of its friends and supporters, who took only a superficial view of the subject, joined in these denunciations.

Every step taken by the Navy Department on this question, its instructions, and its policy, were reported to the President, who approved of them without reserve, modification, or qualification. The course of the Secretary of War was very similar, though then and when making up his annual report a few months later he was more demonstrative, and took advanced positions on the slavery question, which, if such were the fixed and determined policy of the Administration, might have been more appropriately enunciated by the President than by one of the departments. The officers of the navy conformed to the instructions and views of the Navy Department, and with, I believe, a single exception, returned no slaves to their previous owners in the rebel States. None were repelled who came on board our ships or sought protection under the flag. In the armies there were widely differing views and practice. Some of the generals, looking to the laws and not to the Executive or department for authority, were for excluding slaves from the Union lines, and if they came, for delivering them up to their rebel masters, using in some instances Union soldiers for that purpose. Others, taking a different view and going to greater length than their instructions would warrant, invited the slaves to their standard and proclaimed freedom to

all who came or were within their departments. The orders and assumptions of some of the military commanders caused uneasiness, and in several instances rendered necessary counter and annulling orders by the President. It was evident to most of the dispassionate and clear minds of the country that the secessionists had by their own nets struck a fatal blow to the institution of slavery, yet the country was not fully prepared to pronounce freedom to all slaves. The orders of such officers as Generals McClellan, Halleck, Dix, and others, prohibiting the fugitives from coming within the army lines, caused great dissatisfaction in the North without appeasing any at the South.

As late as the 19th of May, 1862, the President by proclamation annulled a document of General Hunter, proclaiming freedom to the slaves of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. In that proclamation the President said: "I further make known that whether it be competent for me as Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy to declare the slaves of any State or States free, and whether at any time, in any case, it shall have become a necessity indispensable to the maintenance of the government to exercise such supposed power, are questions which under my responsibility I reserve to myself, and which I cannot feel justified in leaving to the decision of commanders in the field."

For more than a year this annoying and perplexing question had on the frontier or border States, on the Gulf of Mexico, on the Atlantic coast, and on the Potomac, embarrassed the Administration. The shield which, by the compromises of the Constitution and the laws of the country, was thrown over the institution of slavery, and the property rights of the slave owners, were respected by the Administration long after it was known that the rebels were directly and indirectly employing their slaves in the war against the Government. But as the war progressed the anti-slavery feeling increased. There was a reluctance, however, on the part of the Government to adopt measures, even under the reverses of war, which conflicted with the compromises of the Constitution. The President seemed more averse than Congress, where party feeling prevailed notwithstanding the war, to touch this delicate question. Much has been justly said and written of his phi-

lanthropic and humanitarian feelings, and it is asserted that his benevolence prompted the proclamation of emancipation. He had the kind and generous nature imputed to him, but in his official relations and in issuing the proclamation of freedom he was governed, not by sympathy for the slave, but by a sense of duty, and the obligations which as Chief Magistrate he owed to his country.

To conciliate and retain the border States, torn by intestine factions, in their rightful position, required for a period all the skill, tact, and ability of the President, aided by the best minds and talents of the country. No means had been left unemployed by the rebel leaders to detach these States from the Union, and the slavery element, in which they had a common interest with the rebels, was the instrumentality on which they chiefly relied to effect a separation. Hatred of the abolitionists and the radical portion of the Republican party was as intense in the border States as further South; but a majority of the people in that belt of States were patriotic and loved the Union, to which they clung with a devotion unsurpassed in any section. They had, moreover, a growing confidence in the President, and in their great trouble they looked to him, who was overwhelmed with the calamities of the nation and people he had been elected to govern and was striving to reconcile, for support and protection. Step by step, yet with hesitation, Congress ventured, as hostilities were prolonged and increased, to take measures restrictive of the disturbing element which originated and aggravated the war. Each and every movement was resisted by the opponents of the Administration, and on each its friends were divided; but by degrees, though gradual, the positive element made advances. Congress delayed, however, to go to the root of the difficulty, and strike for general emancipation.

Convinced that the disturbing cause of our national difficulties must be removed in order to restore and perpetuate unity, the President conceived the idea of compensated, prospective emancipation, and for a time fostered the scheme of a voluntary movement by the border States. A part of this scheme was a plan for the deportation of the colored race; for Mr. Lincoln had a belief, amounting almost to conviction, that the two races

could not long dwell together in unity and as equals in their social relations. There was, he thought, a natural antagonism between the whites and blacks which could not and ought not to be overcome. He therefore, at an early period of his administration, some time before his emancipation proclamation was projected, devised plans for the deportation and colonizing of the colored population, and especially of slaves who might thenceforward receive their freedom. In these various projects of deportation and colonization he was earnestly sustained by the Attorney-General, Mr. Bates, the Postmaster-General, Mr. Blair, and the Secretary of the Interior, Mr. Caleb Smith; but each and every device, and especially the Thompson proposition for a colony at Chiriqui, and the Senator Pomeroy's scheme to transplant our negroes to Central America or the West Indies, proved signal failures.

Although there was little doubt after war commenced that chattel slavery was doomed, there was much doubt and uncertainty when and in what manner its total extinction was to be brought about. Men and parties paused when they approached the subject of setting free the laboring millions of the South, a movement fraught with consequences, immediate and remote, such as human foresight could not penetrate. The executive and legislative authorities hesitated to strike the first effective blow, yet each seconded and sustained the propositions and advances of the other. The President, practical, sagacious, and shrewd, suggested that the border States, in view of the impending and certain fate of slavery, should avail themselves of an opportunity to set free their bondsmen, and that they should receive pecuniary compensation for the act. Were they to take the initiative in emancipation, which they as distinct commonwealths, having each within itself entire and absolute control of the subject, could do, it would relieve the Government, which was engaged in a life struggle with the rebels in the cotton and rice growing region, of serious embarrassment in dealing with a question that was not national, but had been expressly reserved to the States. It would be the beginning of a movement that would sweep the whole South, and end in general emancipation. He therefore on the 6th of March, 1862,

addressed a message to Congress, recommending that "the United States ought to coöperate with any State which may adopt gradual abolishment of slavery, giving to such State pecuniary aid," etc.

In a conference which he invited with the border State delegations a few days later—the 10th of March—he explained more in detail his views; but his policy of voluntary emancipation did not meet a favorable response. Congress, however, expressed its concurrence in the project, but did not make the necessary contingent appropriation, which would have encouraged and justified the authorities of any State that might entertain the proposition.

The policy of voluntary emancipation by the States was perseveringly pressed for some months; but not succeeding, that of general emancipation began to be entertained, though not until after fifteen months of active hostilities, during which the Government exercised extraordinary forbearance, and every effort to induce State action was a failure. In July, after the reverses before Richmond, the President visited the army at Harrison's Landing. From his observations in that visit he became convinced that the war must be prosecuted with more vigor, and that some decisive measures were necessary on the slavery question, not only to reconcile public sentiment and to consolidate and make uniform military action, but to bring the slave element to our aid instead of having it turned against us. Some of the generals assumed that they should be governed by the laws and not by military necessity and executive orders; and there was a belief, hardly a design perhaps, among a few of their indiscreet partisans, that these generals, better than the Administration, could prescribe the course of governmental action.

General McClellan, popular with the army, which was composed of citizens who were voters and a political power in this respect, flattered himself and was persuaded by others that he, though not always consistent, could mark out a course of civil administration that would be acceptable to the whole country. In a letter of the 7th of July, 1862, written at Harrison's Landing, he proffered to President Lincoln much unasked-for political advice, some of which, if sound in principle, was extraordinary in its language and

almost mandatory in its terms. Among other things he informed the President that "military government should be confined to the preservation of public order and the protection of political rights. Military power should not be allowed to interfere with the relations of servitude, either by supporting or impairing the authority of the master, except for repressing disorder as in other cases. Slaves, contraband under the act of Congress, seeking military protection, should receive it. The right of the Government to appropriate permanently to its own service claims to slave labor should be asserted, and the right of the owner to compensation therefor should be recognized."

That singular letter from the General at the head of the armies to the Chief Magistrate under whom he served struck the President painfully, but he was not insensible to any valuable salutary suggestions that were made by the military commander whom he had most trusted. The reverses before Richmond undoubtedly hastened the movement of emancipation. Until those disasters, the President had hoped the rebellion would be suppressed without disturbing the compromises of the Constitution, or requiring Federal action on a subject which was expressly reserved to the States. Returning from the headquarters of the army, which he visited on the 8th of July, and grieved with what he had witnessed, he resolved to make one more earnest effort with the delegations from the border States to initiate a policy of voluntary emancipation by those States. He prepared a carefully written speech on board the steamer before he reached Washington, which he read to the border State representatives in a conference which he invited at the executive mansion on Saturday, the 12th of July. As had been the case with all the movements which he made in that direction, he received little encouragement at this interview, though the plan was for their benefit and the substantial interest of the whole country. The discussion, though harmonious and frank, gave him little or no hope of success, and its unpromising aspect greatly depressed him. The delegations were to give him their answer soon, but the debate left him in no doubt of its character, and he felt the necessity of adopting a different policy.

On Sunday, the 13th of July, the day

following this last hopeless interview, the President invited Mr. Seward and myself to accompany him in his carriage to the funeral of an infant child of Secretary Stanton. At that time Mr. Stanton occupied for a summer residence the house of a naval officer, some two or three miles west or northwest of Georgetown. It was on this occasion and this ride that he first mentioned to Mr. Seward and myself that he had about come to the conclusion that, if the rebels persisted in their war upon the Government, it would be a necessity and a duty on our part to liberate their slaves. He was convinced, he said, that we could not carry on a successful war by longer pursuing a temporizing and forbearing policy toward those who disregarded law and Constitution, and were striving by every means to break up the Union. Decisive and extreme measures must be adopted. His reluctance to meddle with this question, around which there were thrown constitutional safeguards, and on which the whole Southern mind was sensitive, was great. He had tried various expedients to escape issuing an executive order emancipating the slaves, the last and only alternative, but it was forced upon him by the rebels themselves. He saw no escape. Turn which way he would, this disturbing element which caused the war rose up against us, and it was an insuperable obstacle to peace. He had entertained hopes that the border States, in view of what appeared to him inevitable if the war continued, would consent to some plan of prospective and compensated emancipation; but all his suggestions, some made as early as March, met with disfavor, although actual hostilities had then existed for a year. Congress was now about adjourning, and had done nothing final and conclusive—perhaps could do nothing on this question. He had since his return from the army the last week called the members of Congress from the border States together, and presented to them the difficulties which he encountered, in hopes they would be persuaded, in the gloomy condition of affairs, to take the initiative step toward emancipation; but they hesitated, and he apprehended would do nothing. Attached as most of them and a large majority of their constituents were to what they called their labor system, they felt it would be unjust for the Government which they

supported to compel them to abandon that system, while the States in flagrant rebellion retained their slaves and were spared the sacrifice. A movement toward emancipation in the border States while slavery was recognized and permitted in the rebel States would, they believed, detach many from the Union cause and strengthen the insurrection. There was, he presumed, some foundation for their apprehension. What had been done and what he had heard satisfied him that a change of policy in the conduct of the war was necessary, and that emancipation of the slaves in the rebel States must precede that in the border States. The blow must fall first and foremost on them. Slavery was doomed. This war, brought upon the country by the slave-owners, would extinguish slavery, but the border States could not be induced to lead in that measure. They would not consent to be convinced or persuaded to take the first step. Forced emancipation in the States which continued to resist the Government would of course be followed by voluntary emancipation in the loyal States, with the aid we might give them. Further efforts with the border States would, he thought, be useless. That was not the road to lead us out of this difficulty. We must take a different path. We wanted the army to strike more vigorous blows. The Administration must set the army an example, and strike at the heart of the rebellion. The country, he thought, was prepared for it. The army would be with us. War had removed constitutional obligations and restrictions with the declared rebel communities. The law required us to return the fugitives who escaped to us. This we could and must do with friends, but not with enemies. We invited all, bond and free, to desert those who were in flagrant war upon the Union and come to us; and uniting with us they must be made free from rebel authorities and rebel masters.

If there was no constitutional authority in the Government to emancipate the slaves, neither was there any authority, specified or reserved, for the slaveholders to resist the Government or secede from it. They could not at the same time throw off the Constitution and invoke its aid. Having made war upon the Government, they were subject to the incidents and calamities of war, and it was our duty to avail ourselves of every necessary measure

to maintain the Union. If the rebels did not cease their war, they must take the consequences of war. He dwelt earnestly on the gravity, importance, and delicacy of the movement, which he had approached with reluctance, but he saw no evidence of a cessation of hostilities; said he had given the subject much thought, and had about come to the conclusion that it was a military necessity, absolutely essential to the preservation of the Union. We must free the slaves or be ourselves subdued. The slaves were undeniably an element of strength to those who had their service, and we must decide whether that element should be with us or against us. For a long time the subject had lain heavy on his mind. His interview with the representatives of the border States had forced him slowly but he believed correctly to this conclusion, and this present opportunity was the first occasion he had had of mentioning to any one his convictions of what in his opinion must be our course. He wished us to state frankly, not immediately, how the proposition of emancipation struck us, in case of the continued persistent resistance to Federal authority.

Mr. Seward remarked that the subject involved consequences so vast and momentous, legal and political, he should wish to bestow on it mature reflection before advising or giving a decisive answer; but his present opinion inclined to the measure as justifiable, and perhaps he might say expedient and necessary. These were essentially my views, more matured perhaps, for I had practically been dealing with slavery from the beginning as a wrecked institution. During that ride the subject was the absorbing theme, and before separating the President requested us to give it early, special, and deliberate consideration, for he was earnest in the conviction that the time had arrived when decisive action must be taken; that the Government could not be justified in any longer postponing it; that it was forced upon him as a necessity—it was thrust at him from various quarters; it occupied his mind and thoughts day and night. He repeated he had about come to a conclusion, driven home to him by the conference of the preceding day, but wished to know our views and hear any suggestions either of us might make.

This was a new departure for the President. Until that Sunday, in all our pre-

vious intercourse, whenever the subject of emancipation or interference with slavery in the States, in any way or form, had been alluded to, he had been prompt and emphatic in disclaiming and disavowing any authority or right on the part of the General Government to move in it; he had been reluctant to treat the rising at the South otherwise than as an insurrection. In one or two conversations that followed within a few days, it was said that if the Southern States and people were within the pale of the Constitution, and had not absolved their connection with and obligations to it, and disavowed and resisted the laws and constituted authorities, they were entitled to all its guarantees. But it was known to the whole world that there was a war of more than a year's duration, which was being prosecuted with constantly increasing bitterness against the Government; that there was a denial and defiance of national authority by the States in rebellion, which had placed them in the attitude of belligerents—public enemies; that they must be treated as such, and abide the consequences of their own acts. If they possessed full, absolute, inherent original sovereignty, or could resume it, as they asserted they had done by their acts of secession, and become aliens, foreigners to the United States, it was not for them to claim protection and aid from the Government which they repudiated, for the continued enslavement of an unfortunate race. They and their sympathizing friends and abettors could not insist that what was a chief element of strength to them and of injury to the Union should be shielded and secured to them by the Constitution and the government which they, as enemies, sought to destroy. So long as the slave States, or any of them, acknowledged the supremacy of the Constitution and adherence to the Government and the Union, to them was the inviolability of slavery secured and observed. The President and every member of the Cabinet considered it and treated it as a local domestic subject, the creation of municipal, not national law, appertaining to the States exclusively and respectively, and that they had never parted with, but reserved their authority over it.

The reverses before Richmond, and the formidable power and dimensions of the insurrection, which extended through all

the slave States, and had combined most of them in a confederacy or league to dissolve the Union, impelled the Administration to adopt extraordinary measures, and to exercise all its power to preserve the national existence. The slaves, if not to any considerable extent armed and disciplined as soldiers, were in the service of those who were soldiers, engaged as field laborers, producers, and domestic servants, and thousands of them were in camp attending upon the armies in the field, employed as waiters, and in the construction of fortifications and intrenchments for those whose avowed object was the overthrow of the government and the dissolution of the Union.

Early in August—it has been said on Saturday, and if so it was, I think, the 2d of that month—the President called a special meeting of the Cabinet. The meeting was in the library of the executive mansion, and not in the council chamber, where the regular sessions were usually convened. All were present except Mr. Blair, who had gone to his country residence in Montgomery county. If I am not mistaken, Mr. Chase was also from some cause absent from this first meeting. The President stated that the object for which he had called us together was to submit the rough draft of a proclamation to emancipate, after a certain day, all slaves in the States which should then be in rebellion. There were, he remarked, differences in the Cabinet on the slavery question, and on emancipation, but he invited free discussion on the important step he was about to take; and to relieve each one from embarrassment, he wished it understood that the question was settled in his own mind; that he had decreed emancipation in a certain contingency, and the responsibility of the measure was his; but he desired to hear the views of his associates and receive any suggestions, pro or con, which they might make. He had, he said, dwelt much and long on the subject, and formed his own conclusions, and had mentioned the matter in confidence to one or two of the members. Little was said by any one but the President. Mr. Bates expressed his very decided approval, but wished deportation to be coupled with emancipation. He was, it was well known, opposed to slavery. Though born in a slave State, and always residing in a slave State and among

slaves, he nevertheless wished them free, and that the colored race should leave the country. It was impossible, he said, for the two races to assimilate but by amalgamation, and they could not amalgamate without degradation and demoralization to the white race. The whites might be brought down, but the negroes could not be lifted to a much higher plane than they now occupied. He had been a close observer of the influence of slavery on the enterprise and welfare of the country through a long life, had deplored its effects, and himself had given freedom to his own slaves, and wished them and their fellows in Africa, or elsewhere than in the United States. He was fully convinced that the two races could not live and thrive in social proximity. The result of any attempt to place them on terms of equality would be strife, contention, and a vicious population, as in Mexico. The whites might be debased, but the blacks could not be elevated, even by the disgusting process of mixed breeds, which was repugnant to nature and to our moral and better instincts. He therefore wished a system of deportation to accompany any scheme of emancipation. These were also the President's views.

Mr. Seward, without expressing an opinion on the merits of the question, thought it would be well to postpone the whole subject to a more auspicious period. If the proclamation were issued now, it would be received and considered as a despairing cry—a shriek from and for the Administration, rather than for freedom. The President instantly felt and appreciated the force and propriety of the suggestion. We had experienced serious disasters. Important results were in the immediate future; high hopes were entertained from army operations under Halleck and Pope, who had just taken the direction of military affairs. The President at once closed his portfolio and suspended his proclamation and all further proceedings on the subject of emancipation. I do not recollect that it was again alluded to in Cabinet until after the battle of Antietam, which took place on the 17th of September—six weeks later.

The disasters of the army under McClellan were not retrieved by Pope and Halleck. Dark and heavy clouds hung over the country, and the civil service was depressed in consequence of military re-

verses. But the spirit of the people against what they deemed the inciting cause of hostilities became more aggravated and intense by the military failures, and the demand for freedom to the slaves, which had been increasing for months, came thick and fast and from various quarters upon the Administration. Among others who were impatient under what they considered the inexcusable neglect and inaction of the President was Horace Greeley, the editor of one of the widest circulated and most influential journals in the country. Uninformed, like others, of the purposes and contemplated movements of the Government, but filled with patriotic fervor, such as a year previous had led him and men like him, possessed of more zeal than military knowledge, to insist that the army should, while not duly prepared, move on to Richmond, he now, on the 19th of August, addressed a letter, earnest but dictatorial in tone, to the President, admonishing him of public sentiment and of his duty. This letter was not sent through the mail as a friendly epistle, with the friendly suggestions and advice of a friend, but for some reason, good or bad, was published in the "New York Tribune." The effect of this publication on the ardent and unreasoning fanatical mind was to increase discontent towards the Administration. This, however, was cooled and counteracted almost immediately by the calm, deliberate, and statesmanlike answer of the President. This reply, on the 22d of August, discloses the real views and principles by which the President was governed better than any other. He said:

The sooner the national authority can be restored, the nearer the Union will be—the Union as it was.

If there be those who would not save the Union unless they could at the same time save slavery, I do not agree with them.

If there be those who would not save the Union unless they could at the same time destroy slavery, I do not agree with them.

My paramount object is to save the Union, and not either to save or to destroy slavery.

If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that.

What I do about slavery and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union; and what I forbear, I forbear because I do not believe it would help to save the Union.

I shall do less whenever I shall believe what I am doing hurts the cause, and shall do more

whenever I believe doing more will help the cause.

In these brief paragraphs will be found the controlling motives, principles, and purpose of the President—the true key to his official actions on this subject. He was Chief Magistrate, to maintain, preserve, and so far as in him lay to perpetuate the Union. Slavery or emancipation was a secondary consideration, a mere incident to that great object. He did not and could not inform the distinguished journalist who took upon himself to be his mentor that there was in his portfolio a proclamation of emancipation, prepared in obedience to the national necessities, but which, for public considerations was temporarily suspended. Yet such was the fact. His sympathies were as great and his philanthropy as broad and deep as those of any one who appealed to him; but his legal and constitutional obligations were paramount. He proved himself a statesman. Many blamed him for inaction in the cause of freedom then, as subserviency to the slave oligarchy. Many have extolled his decree of emancipation since, as the kindly prompting of a generous nature. It was neither, but a sense of duty—his honest conviction, acting under the highest responsibility that was ever devolved on a Chief Magistrate—which controlled him when the impulsive were restless and the benevolent impatient. The proclamations of emancipation were not the off-spring of mere humanitarianism, as many of the superficial and thoughtless suppose, but of the highest and noblest statesmanship. Fidelity to the Union and to the Constitution, both of which were imperilled in that dark and gloomy period of the great struggle, influenced and controlled him. He was President to preserve the Union, not to destroy it, or to permit it to be destroyed; to observe the compromises and ordinances of the fundamental law, not to overthrow or discard them. It was no part of his duty or trust, whatever might be his individual sympathy, to interfere with or molest the institutions and laws of the States, or to trespass on their reserved rights, so long as they observed and respected Federal rights; but he could omit no legitimate duty to remove any obstacles which endangered the national existence. Certain States made war upon the Government in behalf of slavery, and were avail-

ing themselves of the slave element to dissolve the Union. He had Federal rights to maintain while observing the rights of the States.

Individuals and public meetings appealed to him in behalf of emancipation more earnestly as our military disasters increased. The Rev. Dr. Patton of Chicago, at the head of a deputation from the clergymen of northern Illinois, called on me on the 13th of September and requested an introduction of himself and his associates to the President, in order to urge upon him more active and decided measures in the cause of freedom. The President expressed his willingness to receive them, and after listening to their memorial he stated some of the difficulties which embarrassed him, but assured them he had not decided against proclaiming liberty to the slaves. He held the subject under advisement; it was on his mind by day and by night, more than any other. Whatever should appear to be God's will he would do.

A special Cabinet meeting was convened on Saturday, the 20th of September, when the preliminary proclamation for emancipation was again submitted. In bringing it forward on this occasion the President remarked that, though suspended for several weeks, the subject had never been lost sight of. He had in the mean time made a few verbal alterations, without changing the character of the paper, which he thought and which undoubtedly were improvements. All listened with profound attention to the reading, and it was, I believe, assented to by every member. Mr. Bates repeated the opinions he had previously expressed in regard to the deportation of the colored race. Mr. Seward proposed two slight verbal alterations, which were adopted. A general discussion then took place, covering the whole ground—the constitutional question—the war power—the expediency and the effect of the movement. After the matter had been very fully debated, Mr. Stanton made a very emphatic speech sustaining the measure, and in closing said the act was so important, and involved consequences so vast, that he hoped each member would give distinctly and unequivocally his own individual opinion, whatever that opinion might be. Two gentlemen he thought had not been sufficiently explicit, although they had discussed the question freely,

and it was understood that they concurred in the measure. He referred, he said to the Secretary of the Treasury and (hesitating a moment) the Secretary of the Navy. It was understood, I believe, by all present, that he had allusion to another member, with whom he was not in full accord.

Mr. Chase admitted that the subject had come upon him unexpectedly and with some surprise. It was going a step farther than he had ever proposed, but he was prepared to accept and support it. He was glad the President had made this advance, which he should sustain from his heart, and he proceeded to make an able impromptu argument in its favor.

I stated that the President did not misunderstand my position, nor any other member; that I assented most unequivocally to the measure as a war necessity, and had acted upon it.

Mr. Blair took occasion to say that he was an emancipationist from principle; that he had for years, here and in Missouri, where he formerly resided, openly advocated it; but he had doubts of the expediency of this executive action at this particular juncture. We ought not, he thought, to put in jeopardy the patriotic element in the border States, already severely tried. This proclamation would, as soon as it reached them, be likely to carry over those States to the secessionists. There were also party men in the free States who were striving to revive old party lines and distinctions, into whose hand we were putting a club to be used against us. The measure he approved, but the time was inopportune. He should wish, therefore, to file his objections.

This, the President said, Mr. Blair could do. He had, however, considered the danger to be apprehended from the first objection mentioned, which was undoubtedly serious, but the difficulty was as great not to act as to act. There were two sides to that question. For months he had labored to get those States to move in this matter, convinced in his own mind that it was their true interest to do so, but his labors were vain. We must make the forward movement. They would acquiesce, if not immediately, soon; for they must be satisfied that slavery had received its death-blow from slave-owners—it could not survive the rebellion. As regarded the other objection, it had not much

weight with him; their clubs would be used against us, take what course we might.

The question of power in the Government to act—authority to set free the slaves in the rebel States—was not, in this war for the Union, controverted or doubted by any member of the Administration. It was suggested by some that preliminary legislation would be advisable before a decisive step was taken by the Executive; but it was answered, Congress was clothed with no authority on the subject, nor was the Executive, save under the war power—military necessity—martial law—where there could be no legislation. Congress had, however, taken some action, indicating the sentiments of that body and the country.

Before reading the proclamation the President again said he felt the great responsibility of the step he was taking, both to himself and the country. It had oppressed him, and not until all other measures and expedients failed had he come to the conclusion that this element, which was arbitrarily used against us, must be brought into the Union cause. Having reached that conclusion, his decision was fixed and unalterable. The act and all its responsibilities were his alone. He had prepared the paper which he was again about to read without advice or assistance—had pondered over it for weeks, and been more confirmed in the rectitude of the measure as time passed on. There had been moments when he felt awed and overwhelmed by the gravity and magnitude of the subject and of what might follow, but his way was now clear—he knew he was right. Among other things, he said in a somewhat subdued tone, he had looked to a Higher Power for aid and direction. He had made a vow that if God gave us the victory in the impending battle he would receive it as an indication of the Divine Will that it was his duty to go forward in the work of emancipation. In a manner half apologetic, he said this might seem strange, but there were occasions when, uncertain how to proceed—when it was not clear to his mind what he should do—he had in this way submitted the disposal of the subject to a Higher Power, and abided by what seemed the Supreme Will. Events at Sharpsburg had confirmed and strengthened his original purpose in regard to emancipation.

and he had no hesitation in issuing this preliminary order; the States interested would decide for themselves as to its consummation.

This was not the only occasion when he manifested the peculiar faith or trait here exhibited. It was doubtless to be attributed in a great measure to the absence of early religious culture—a want of educational advantages in his youthful, frontier life. In the wilderness of Indiana fifty years ago there were few churches, and only an occasional wandering preacher furnished the sparse population with rude religious instruction. Although his early opportunities for religious improvement had been few, there was deep-seated within him a feeling of dependence and trust in that Supreme Intelligence which rules and governs all.

Some general conversation followed the reading of the document, when the President handed it to the Secretary of State, with directions to publish it forthwith.

There were, I think, apprehensions and anxiety on the minds of every member of the Administration as to the effect which the proclamation would have on the public mind. I make an extract from a memorandum of my own on the 22d of September, which expresses my views and feelings at the time: "The subject, aside from the ethical view of the question, has, from its magnitude and its uncertain results, a solemnity and weight that oppresses me. It is a step in the progress of this war—a beginning, the results of which will extend into the distant future. A favorable termination of the war seems more remote with every movement. Unless the rebels hasten to avail themselves of the alternative now presented—and I see little probability of it—the end can scarcely be other than emancipation of the slaves, and subjugation of their masters, carrying with it a revolution of the social, civil, and industrial habits and condition of society in all the slave States. There is in the free States a prevailing opinion that this measure will secure a speedy peace. I cannot say that I so view it. There will be the energy of desperation on the part of the slave-owners, aided by those who sympathize with them, which with the impending pecuniary sacrifices will intensify the struggle. While, however, dark clouds are before us and around us.

I do not see in the twilight of the future how the measure taken could be avoided, and I know not that it is desirable it should be. It is a despotic act in the cause of the Union, and I may add of freedom."

The immediate effect of this extraordinary and radical measure—almost revolutionary in its character—was less turbulent and exciting, North and South, than had been generally apprehended. It called out no excessive jubilation on one part, nor angry violence on the other. For a time it failed to strengthen the Administration in any section. It imparted no vigor but rather depression and weakness to the North nor strength to the secession cause in the South, where there began to be a conscious feeling of the fatal step they had taken. Mr. Blair's forebodings as to the effect on the approaching autumn elections were realized. Many who had resisted secession were not prepared to sustain the Executive in a measure which was without direct warrant from the Constitution, though adopted as a necessity to defend and preserve it and the Union from rebellious assailants, whose avowed purpose was to destroy both. The emancipationists, who had urged decisive action upon the President, relaxed for a time their energies after action was taken, and the fall elections were adverse to the Administration.

In the rebel or Confederate Government there was much empty gaseousness, and many loud threats and denunciations for this executive act; but they ended in mere declamation. It had become a conviction with the intelligent minds of the South that the rebellion had put slavery in jeopardy, and that if the rebellion was suppressed slavery would be extinguished. The proclamation brought conviction of this fact to their minds, and alarmed and weakened them.

Following the preliminary proclamation, and as a part of the plan, was the question of deporting and colonizing the colored race. This was a part of the President's scheme, and had occupied his mind some time before the project for emancipation was adopted, although the historians, biographers, and commentators have made slight, if any, allusion to it. The President, however, and a portion of his Cabinet considered them in-

separable, and that deportation should accompany and be a part of the emancipation movement.

A speculating operation for colonizing and taking possession of a tract of country in Central America, known as the Chiriqui grant or purchase in Costa Rica, had been in progress under the Buchanan Administration, and greatly interested President Lincoln, who thought it might be used for colonization purposes. He had in the spring of 1861 expressed a favorable opinion of the scheme, and referred it to me for investigation, and if I approved it, to bring forward the necessary measures to carry it into effect. Without here going into details of that investigation, I became satisfied that it was a speculating, if not a swindling scheme, and so reported, and declined to further consider the subject. It was then referred to the Secretary of the Interior, a friend of the scheme and the parties. He made a very skillful and adroit report in its favor, stating that there was an abundance of the best quality of coal in the Chiriqui purchase, which a colony of emancipated negroes could mine, and recommending that such a colony should be established, and that the Navy Department should procure its supplies of fuel from that source. The President gave the project favorable consideration, and in compliance with it proposed to issue an order directing the Navy Department to procure its coal from Chiriqui, and to make an advance to the company of \$50,000 to aid in its colonizing and mining purposes. To this I wholly and entirely objected, and when the President became aware that the law required coal to be purchased by annual contract awarded to the lowest bidder, and that we had such a contract only partly executed, the scheme was abandoned. But the plan of deportation and colonization by the Government was not given up. It was pressed as an incidental and necessary part of the emancipation proceeding. The President brought the subject of deporting the freed slaves before the Cabinet on Tuesday, the 23d of September, the day succeeding his preliminary emancipation proclamation, when it was discussed at some length, and again on Friday, the 26th. There was a diversity of opinion in the Cabinet on this measure, but ultimately a majority opposed it. The President, in reluctantly giving up the Chiri-

qui project, declared himself opposed to the proposition of the Attorney-General, Mr. Bates, who also opposed the Chiriqui scheme, but who read an elaborate paper in favor of compulsory emigration or deportation.

Deportation and colonization eventually died out, after a feeble and abortive effort to plant a cargo of negroes at Cow Island; but emancipation became a success.

On Tuesday, the 30th of December, the President read to the Cabinet the draft of his proclamation emancipating the slaves in the rebellious States, pursuant to his preliminary proclamation of the 22d of September, and, as usual with his public papers, invited criticism. A general debate took place that day, but without much definite point, or any new suggestion in the discussion. The President directed that copies of the paper should be made and sent to each member of the Cabinet, and ordered a special meeting on the next day, Wednesday, the 31st of December, to hear remarks and receive suggestions. At that meeting two or three verbal alterations were suggested. All but one of them were, I think, proposed by Mr. Seward. Four members, viz., Messrs. Seward, Chase, Blair, and myself, without interchanging opinions, advised that any and all exceptions of fractional parts of any State should be omitted. It was stated that, slavery being the creature of local law, no State where it existed could discriminate in its enactments so as to authorize its continuance in some counties, yet prohibit it in others. There could be no such unequal, sectional legislation in any State. But the President, while he felt the force of the suggestion, declined to make the omission, conceiving himself committed in his preliminary proclamation. Mr. Chase proposed the felicitous closing paragraph, declaring the sincerity of the Executive in this act, believed to be an act of justice warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity, and invoking for it the considerate judgment of mankind and the gracious favor of Almighty God.

All the suggestions, written and oral, which had been made, were received by the President, who said he would consider them and complete the document. This was done, and the paper signed and published on the following day, the 1st of January, 1863.

The speculations as to the origin of the proclamation and the influence and causes which prompted the emancipation movement have been many, and some of them merely imaginary or conjectural. It has been said it was done to prevent a recognition of the Confederacy by European governments; that it was extorted by the ultra abolitionists, who threatened the Administration; that the President was overborne and subdued by appeals which the clergy and others addressed to him. Some or all of these may have tended to confirm him, but the origin was with neither. The war and war necessities had modified his views and overcome his primary, undisguised reluctance to adopt a measure for which he had no express constitutional or legal authority—nothing but absolute military necessity. The calamities of the war, which were prolonged, and the condition of national affairs, convinced him that to confer freedom on the four millions who were in bondage would be the most fatal blow he could strike against the rebellion, and the most effectual if not the only measure that would give peace and prosperity to the Union.

The period when he came to this conclusion, and decided to give by an executive act freedom to the slaves, has been a controverted question on the part of his biographers, historians, and commentators, but no specific day or influence can be named. Impressed with the importance, solemnity, and responsibility of the measure, he was slow and deliberate in adopting it. For more than a year after his inauguration, he resisted the appeals and the threats of his ultra supporters, who urged him to use the war necessity and strike the fetters from the slave, in the confident belief that peace would be restored and the compromises of the Constitution maintained unimpaired, without resorting to this necessity. But gradually the conviction dawned upon him that the cause which led to the rebellion must be removed before harmony could prevail. For a time he indulged the hope that the border States would view the subject as he viewed it, and come to the same conclusion. If so, they in the wreck and downfall of the institution would, he thought, gladly avail themselves of the proposition of gradual and compensated emancipation. Disappointed after repeated earnest appeals addressed to the

patriotism and the pecuniary interest of the States, and failing to persuade them to take the initiative by voluntarily relinquishing slavery, he was compelled to take the other and extreme alternative of addressing himself to the rebels themselves, and warning them that if they persisted in rebellion after a given date, he should adopt the policy of emancipation.

His interview with the representatives on the 12th of July, and his ineffectual appeal to them to favor a scheme for voluntary, prospective, and compensated emancipation, forced upon him the conviction that all arguments and appeals in that quarter were vain and useless, and that a different, stronger, and more ultra policy was necessary. They, and the constituency on whom they relied, were most of them Union men, but they clung to the system of productive slave labor to which they had been accustomed. Their secession opponents at the South had from the beginning taunted them with the assertion that if they adhered to the Union cause the abolitionists would set free their slaves and subvert their industrial and social system. This they had repelled, and when appealed to by the President felt that they could not sustain themselves at home if they gave in to the measure. They therefore declined the propositions he made.

It was after that last fruitless and hopeless interview with the border State representatives, on Saturday the 12th of July, that he became convinced the Government would be compelled to adopt the principle of emancipating the slaves in the rebel States in order to close the conflict. In all probability the alternative of this harsher and more responsible measure toward the extreme South, in case the border States could not be persuaded to come into his project of voluntary emancipation, had been evolved in his mind before that last meeting. He had urged the project from the 6th of the preceding March, without receiving much encouragement, and the opposition and repugnance manifested at the meeting on the 12th of July satisfied him that a different and more decided policy, and in another direction, must be pursued. In this mood, and with this conviction, after his unsatisfactory interview on Saturday, he felt that he must abandon that project,

and on the following day, Sunday, the 13th, introduced to Mr. Seward and myself the topic that engrossed his mind, with a request that we should give the subject of emancipating the slaves in the Southern States, after a given date, early and earnest consideration. He had not at that time fully determined on issuing a proclamation—had not entirely given up the hope that the border States might yet come into his scheme, which was obviously so much to their advantage; but it had become a remote and glimmering hope, which their written reply on the 14th of July extinguished. Not until after that date did he write his preliminary proclamation, which was, I believe, first read to the Cabinet on Saturday, the 2d of August.

The statement made and reiterated with great confidence, that this proclamation was written on a steamboat when returning from a visit to General McClellan, on the 8th of July, is a mistake. He did, there is little doubt, at that time, when returning on the steamer, write out the speech which he read to the representatives of the border States when he reached Washington. It would be unjust to him as a man, and as Chief Magistrate, to impute to him a disingenuous and a double part in his proposition to the representatives of the border States; to suppose that while he was inviting them to adopt the policy of voluntary emancipation by their respective States, he concealed from them the fact that he was pursuing a different policy, and had indeed, as represented, written a proclamation for general emancipation by the Federal Government. Nor were the two policies compatible. The truth is, he had doubted Federal authority, and therefore

labored earnestly and with fidelity to induce the border States to imitate the milder and practical policy of voluntary emancipation by State action, which they clearly had the right to do. To encourage them in this movement, he promised the influence of the Executive to give them pecuniary aid. Could they have been persuaded to act, the President would have been relieved of embarrassment, for it would have been the first step in a movement which would have eventuated in general emancipation by the undoubted, rightful legitimate State authorities. Not until the last hope of voluntary emancipation was extinguished in the interview on the 12th of July, did he relinquish his early and favorite policy, and take up the controverted and contested one of Federal action, warranted alone by military necessity.

His generous and benevolent nature was gladdened at the close by the result of his proclamation, which gave freedom to four millions in bondage, and contributed in no small degree to the suppression of the rebellion and to the preservation and perpetuation of the Union. The fruition of this measure, adopted under imperious necessity, and with responsibilities and a solemnity that few can appreciate, cheered the last days of the extraordinary man, to whom alone belongs the credit, as he assumed the consequences of the act, and whose untimely death the nation will ever have cause to deplore. Love for his country, its Constitution, and the Union which he had been chosen to guard, was the controlling influence that governed him in one of the most important and responsible measures ever decreed by chief magistrate or ruler.

GIDEON WELLES.

DRIFT-WOOD.

PHASES OF POLITICS.

WHEN this number of the magazine reaches the reader, the canvass now culminating will be as much a part of history as the struggle of Polk and Clay. The wigwags will be to let; the ox-roasts ended; the platforms dismantled and silent; the torches put out; the caoutchouc capes laid away for another season; the surplus documents despatched to the pulp mill; the headquarters deserted, and, in fine, all the election paraphernalia will be set aside as when a puppet-show is over. Wirepullers, wasting nor tears nor cheers on the past, will be casting the horoscope for 1876, wondering, perhaps, how "Blaine of Maine" would take as a war-cry, say in a "Pine Tree" contest, with evergreen appearing everywhere, and the transparencies mottoed "Dirigo"; with a "cone campaign" like the old coon campaign; with barracks built of pine trees, plumes and liberty caps of pine cones, processions pine-clad, platforms pine-crowned, and blazing pine knots for torches, and the streets so lively with this emblematic foliage as to match in multitudinous repetitions the coming of Birnam wood to Dunsinane. All this may be dreamed of a month hence, but just now we are crying "Give One Day to Your Country," "Remember Marcus Morton and the Importance of One Vote," "Beware of Roorbacks"; and the watchwords are Grant and Greeley.

A French writer has declared that a country of universal suffrage is a country governed by the chance roll of the roulette ball in happy days, and by madness and crime in times of trouble—by a system in which two fools carry the day over a philosopher, two drunkards over a sage, two pickpockets over an honest citizen, two road-menders over their engineer, two private soldiers over Sherman, two donkeys over Dexter, two pebbles over a diamond. The Frenchman felt sore because universal suffrage had given him Louis Bonaparte for an emperor, and for a legislature the wise chamber that declared war against Prussia. He is right in demanding that suffrage shall stop short of criminals, brutes, and fools; he

is wrong when he objects to the stone-breaker's vote counting as much as the surveyor's, and the conscript's as the colonel's, because the engineer and the officer, through their character, position, wealth, intelligence, and, in short, through the very qualities on which the claim to superior electoral power is based, may wield a vast indirect influence. The engineer sometimes so controls his road-menders, superintendents so influence their workmen, that the secret ballot must be interposed. At least, then, let all individual votes count alike. Suffrage is certainly not improved by being given to professional thieves; while a reading and writing test is such a premium on education that a man unwillingly disfranchised on that score would rarely let his boy grow up an ignoramus.

In one respect the canvass falsified expectation, completely shifting in hue and tone as it went on. The orators set out on the new path of "reform," they brought up on the old road of "reconstruction"; they began with a cry of "corruption," and before a month were yelling "conciliation." A keynote for one party was struck by Mr. Sumner's famous resolution on the French arms, which, as Mr. Benton would say, "carried a big town meeting speech in its belly"; yet who, for the last six months, has talked of French arms or Sumner's speech? They quietly disappeared from the scene at an early day, as, indeed, did the orator himself, to general surprise, *sans tambours ni trompettes*, like one relapsing from dudgeon to disgust. Since then, each party has given undivided attention to proving itself the only original peacemaker, and requesting to be blessed as such, though some of the londest-langued are "red-hot and still hating," as the Irish vender of roasted chestnuts yonder is crying at his street furnace.

With platforms of platitudes, a canvass of personalities followed as a matter of course. This has been a canvass of calumny all around, and the political "counter" is so full of "lies nailed" to it, that there is no room on the board for even an embryonic fib. What does all

